



Arkansas Department of Health

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Governor Asa Hutchinson
Nathaniel Smith, MD, MPH, Secretary of Health

To: Health Care Providers

From: Dr. Nate Smith, Secretary of Health

Date: Updated April 16, 2020

Regarding: **Updated Guidance Regarding COVID-19 Testing**

Testing capacity and technology for COVID-19 are rapidly changing. PCR tests can now be done using traditional technology or rapid result point of care instruments. These are tests for components of the virus. Serological tests are also available but not appropriate for diagnosis. Over the past week, capacity for COVID-19 testing at commercial labs has increased significantly, resulting in shortened turnaround times. Therefore, the Arkansas Department of Health (ADH) now recommends that clinicians consider testing patients for COVID-19 based solely on their symptoms. This means patients can be tested even if they do not have known risk factors of contact with a person confirmed to have COVID-19 or travel to an area with widespread community transmission of COVID-19.

Providers should use their best clinical judgment to determine if a patient's presentation is consistent with COVID-19 and needs testing. Most patients with confirmed COVID-19 have developed fever and/or symptoms of acute respiratory illness (e.g., cough, difficulty breathing, sore throat). However, some patients have had atypical presentations with diarrhea and without fever. Other groups worthy of screening include those admitted to hospital ICUs, those with sudden onset severe illnesses, and pregnant women. This relaxation of testing criteria will allow for more accurate estimates of COVID-19 prevalence in Arkansas.

Testing capacity at ADH's Public Health Laboratory has also increased. Due to our public health mandate, we continue to prioritize the testing of patients who:

- (1) require a rapid diagnosis because they are hospitalized with significant symptoms or in the intensive care unit, or those who reside in an institutional facility (i.e., long-term care, correctional facility, etc.), or
- (2) are part of the cohort of known contacts of positive cases that we are actively following.

If you have a patient who you think meets criteria for testing at ADH, please call the Physician Hotline at 1-844-930-3023 to discuss the case with an ADH clinician. Otherwise, continue to send specimens to your preferred commercial lab.

CDC recommends providers have a supply of face masks and tissues for patients with symptoms of respiratory infection. These should be provided to patients with symptoms of respiratory infection at check-in. Source control (putting a face mask over the mouth and nose of a symptomatic patient) can help to prevent transmission to others.